

REMARKS

Claims 1, 3-4, 6-12, 15, 17, 19-23 and 25 are currently pending in the present Application, claims 13-14 having been withdrawn from consideration following the July 1, 2003 Restriction/Election Requirement. New grounds of rejection of the claims were entered in the Office Action of March 27, 2004.

Claim Rejections Under § 103(a): Claims 1, 3-4, 6-12, 15, 17, 19-23 and 25 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over admitted prior art in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,954,539 to Hornung ("Hornung"), U.S. Patent No. 4,446,692 to Sonoda ("Sonoda") and German patent document DE 3809038 ("DE '038"). The Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection on the grounds set forth below.

The Applicants have amended the claims to more clearly recite features of the present invention. Specifically, independent claims 1, 15 and 23 have been amended to recite that the ferrules and the connection sections are formed together (*i.e.*, in one piece from the same material), and that the connection sections remain in belt form once the ferrules have been removed, a feature that can offer advantages in automatic processing equipment handling of the ferrules and the residual connection sections during production.

None of the cited references, either alone or in combination, teach or suggest the present invention, as recited in the amended claims. As noted in the Applicants' December 18, 2003 Amendment, Hornung and Sonoda teach forming a belt by connecting their devices to themselves, and thus when the devices are separated from one another, the connection sections between the devices remain

attached to the individual devices (unless a separate step is added to the processing machine to remove the connection sections from the individual devices). *See, e.g.*, Hornung Figs. 4, 8, 12; Sonoda Fig. 13. In any event, the residual connection sections in Hornung and Sonoda are no longer connected in the form of a belt after the devices are separated. For its part, the DE '038 reference fails to cure the deficiencies of Hornung and Sonoda, as it fails to teach or suggest the present invention's belt and ferrule carrier configurations (ferrules and connection sections forming a belt) wherein the ferrules and connection sections are formed together from the same material. *See, e.g.*, DE '038 Abstract; Figs. 1-5 (separate device and film components formed into an assembly in a process involving nearly a dozen process steps.)

Because no combination of Hornung, Sonoda and/or DDE '038 suggests the invention's arrangement of optical ferrules wherein "at least two ferrules are connected with one another by at least one of a plurality of connection sections, at least one of the plurality of ferrules and at least one of the plurality of connection sections are formed in one piece, and the connection sections form a belt on which the ferrules are detachably fixed, such that when the ferrules are detected, the connection sections remain together in belt form," amended claims 1, 15 and 23 and their dependent claims are patentable under § 103(a) over these references. Accordingly, the Applicants respectfully request the pending § 103(a) rejection be reconsidered and withdrawn.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, the Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1, 3-4, 6-12, 15, 17, 19-23 and 25 are now in allowable form. Issuance of a Notice of Allowance for these claims is respectfully requested.

If there are any questions regarding this amendment or the application in general, a telephone call to the undersigned would be appreciated since this should expedite the prosecution of the application for all concerned.

If necessary to effect a timely response, this paper should be considered as a petition for an Extension of Time sufficient to effect a timely response, and please charge any deficiency in fees or credit any overpayments to Deposit Account No. 05-1323 (Docket #080437/49710US).

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Respectfully submitted,



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